

USAWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

THE ROLE OF NATO IN CENTRAL
AND EASTERN EUROPE

by

Mr. René BeBeau
United States Department of State

Ambassador Michael Malinowski
Project Advisor

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ABSTRACT

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NATO has been the mainstay of transatlantic security and cooperation throughout its 55-year existence. It has witnessed a number of enlargements and evolutionary changes during this period. The most dramatic changes, however, have come during the post-Cold War period, as NATO has reached out to its former adversaries from the Warsaw Pact, to the point of accepting many into the Alliance. As the Alliance has enlarged, it has also undertaken a transformation, reflecting the new realities. In addition to continuing its core mission of providing collective defense for its members through traditional military means, the Alliance has, through engagement with the states of the former Warsaw Pact, promoted the development of democracy and stability throughout the region. The process of transformation has been successful enough in 10 of these states to lead to their membership in NATO; several others have expressed interest in eventual membership. NATO has also played a leading role in the Balkans, including the first use of force in NATO's history, during the 1999 Kosovo campaign. This paper examines the process of NATO's role in Central and Eastern Europe. It reviews NATO's engagement with these states and analyzes the success of enlargement to date. It then addresses future prospects and U.S. national interests, to include continued engagement in the Balkans, Ukraine, the Caucasus and the former Soviet states in Central Asia, the question of further enlargement and the issue of U.S. and NATO relations with Russia.

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THE ROLE OF NATO IN CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE

Since its foundation in 1949, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) has been the mainstay of transatlantic security and cooperation. Throughout its 55-year existence, NATO has successfully defended the territory of its members, while providing these states the opportunity to develop and thrive, politically, economically and culturally. During this period, NATO experienced a number of enlargements and evolutionary changes. Until 1989, however, the basic strategic environment – the Cold War – remained the dominant issue for NATO, and its missions supported the strategies of containing the Soviet Union and defending Western democracy.

The fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the end of the Cold War led to massive changes in Central and Eastern Europe. All states in the region rid themselves of decades of Communist rule, and most replaced these regimes with democratic systems. The Soviet-led Warsaw Pact dissolved, as did several states in the region, including the Soviet Union itself. Most of these changes were peaceful, although the breakup of Yugoslavia and conflicts in and between the new states of the Caucasus region were the notable exceptions.

These dramatic changes in the geostrategic environment have led to dramatic changes within NATO itself. With a large number of fledgling democracies to its east, almost all facing daunting challenges for political, economic and social reform, NATO reached out to its former adversaries from the Warsaw Pact. In addition to continuing its core mission of providing collective defense for its members through traditional military means, the Alliance has, through engagement with the states of the former Warsaw Pact, promoted the development of democracy and stability throughout the region. The process of transformation has been successful enough in 10 of these states to lead to their membership in NATO; several others have expressed interest in eventual membership. NATO has also played a leading role in the Balkans, including the first use of force in NATO's history, during the 1999 Kosovo campaign. Additional new missions have developed as a result of September 11.

In 1999, NATO accepted into its ranks for the first time former members of the Warsaw Pact, the very organization created by the Soviet Union to counter NATO. The admittance of the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland into NATO could be considered to mark the symbolic end of the Cold War, and represented the successful transition of these states from Communist-dominated puppets of the Soviet Union to truly free and democratic nations. In 2004, NATO admitted an additional seven new members, again all former Communist states.

Even more dramatically, three of the latest members – Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia – were former republics of the Soviet Union.

This paper examines the process of NATO's role in Central and Eastern Europe. It reviews NATO's engagement with these states and analyzes the success of enlargement to date. It then addresses future prospects and U.S. national interests, to include continued engagement in the Balkans, Ukraine, the Caucasus and the former Soviet states in Central Asia, the question of further enlargement, and the question of U.S. and NATO relations with Russia. Particular focus is given to Ukraine and the Balkan states, those nations with the most reasonable prospects for eventual NATO membership.

BACKGROUND

While the sudden and dramatic changes in Central and Eastern Europe in 1989 and the years immediately following may have created a general sense of euphoria in the region and beyond, there was no guarantee that these newly democratic, and in some cases newly independent, states would be successful. Even the most successful of them, such as Poland, the Czech Republic and Hungary, have faced significant problems; others, such as Ukraine, have made far less progress and continue to struggle with major difficulties. Still others, such as Belarus, some of the former Soviet states in Central Asia, and initially Yugoslavia under Milosevic, failed completely, replacing Communism with a new form of autocracy or even totalitarianism.

Recognizing both the opportunity and the necessity to assist these states in their transformations, the United States and other western nations undertook a myriad of programs to aid the development of democracy and market economy in Central and Eastern Europe. In addition, NATO as an institution also began a series of programs to assist these states, programs which have promoted a broad range of positive developments, including regional stability, democracy, military reform and even economic development. These series of programs have progressively increased the breadth and depth of cooperation between NATO and its member states and the states of Central and Eastern Europe, all the way to NATO membership.

In the early 1990s, NATO and its member states began reaching out to the militaries of the new democracies to the east. The U.S. military's European Command (EUCOM), for instance, developed a program of military-to-military contacts with the states of Central and Eastern Europe (CEE). Through this contact program, U.S. military personnel visited their counterparts in CEE, or vice versa, in order to provide familiarization and education in a wide

range of military subjects. The program, which began modestly but quickly grew in both number of events and scope, was closely coordinated with the Office of the Secretary of Defense, the Joint Staff and the Department of State in Washington. Initially, the program concentrated on topics to assist the transformation of Soviet-style militaries to militaries appropriate for democratic states, such as strengthening understanding and acceptance of civilian control of the military, creation of chaplain corps and development of Western-style judge advocate corps. As the individual country programs progressed, EUCOM's contacts provided advice and guidance on further reform of CEE militaries, in such areas as downsizing (a daunting task faced by nearly every CEE state), transforming from a heavy, offensively-minded military to a defensive one, creation of Western-style joint staffs, acquisition planning, and development of non-commissioned officer corps. While serving to help reform and transform CEE militaries, the program also served to strengthen ties between the U.S. (and indirectly NATO) and CEE militaries, and to make CEE militaries more interoperable with NATO militaries. As the program progressed, ties were further strengthened when EUCOM created a partnership program, pairing a CEE country with a particular U.S. state. The state's National Guard and Reserve forces then undertook the majority of contact programs with their partner country.

Already early in the 1990s, many states in Central and Eastern Europe began expressing interest in joining NATO. Initially, many were driven by their interest in NATO's traditional role – defending its members from the Soviet Union. Recently freed from Soviet domination, but unsure of future Russian policy, they sought security under the umbrella of their former adversaries. Even as the potential threat of an aggressive Russian resurgence faded, interest in NATO membership remained strong, and even grew. Membership in NATO would provide these states external stability in general, not just against a particular threat, and this stability would foster the conditions necessary for political and economic reform and development.

Recognizing the changes in Europe and the opportunity to forge a new security situation in the region, NATO released a new Strategic Concept in 1991. While reaffirming its commitment to the collective defense of its members, the Alliance foresaw a new role for itself beyond the boundaries of its own territory.¹ One of its fundamental security tasks, NATO declared, was “to provide one of the indispensable foundations for a stable security environment in Europe, based on the growth of democratic institutions and commitment to the peaceful resolution of disputes, in which no country would be able to intimidate or coerce any European nation or to impose hegemony through the threat or use of force.”²

NATO's first step in institutionalizing its new role, and its new relationship with Central and Eastern Europe, was the creation of the North Atlantic Cooperation Council (NACC) in 1991. The NACC, whose membership included the CEE states, provided a forum for consultation and cooperation on political and security issues. The NACC helped to alleviate the sense of a security vacuum in Central and Eastern Europe. As the need and opportunity for closer cooperation and integration grew, however, and NATO aspirants sought a stronger organization, the NACC was succeeded by the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council (EAPC) in 1997.³

THE PARTNERSHIP FOR PEACE

The second major step taken by NATO in its relationship with Central and Eastern Europe was the creation of the Partnership for Peace (PFP) program in January 1994, a program which nearly every CEE state, including Russia, soon joined. The PFP offered CEE states an opportunity for closer cooperation with NATO through a host of concrete programs. This increased cooperation fostered a sense of increased security and, in turn, further promoted political and defense reforms in the CEE region. In joining PFP, member countries committed themselves to ensuring civilian control of the military, facilitating transparency in defense planning, developing closer relations with NATO and working to enhance interoperability with NATO.⁴ Since 1994, the PFP has progressed, growing in scope and size. In 2002, for instance, more than 2000 specific activities were offered on a biennial basis, up to and including major military exercises.⁵ In addition, many other activities are offered under the rubric "in the spirit of PFP." These activities include bilateral and multilateral programs such as EUCOM's military-to-military contact program; NATO and the PFP serve as a clearing house to coordinate such activities.

Each nation was and is free to choose its level of participation in the PFP, and the specific programs in which it wishes to participate. This self-differentiation allowed those states interested in NATO membership to pursue more robust programs than states which did not seek membership at the time. Each PFP member, in consultation with NATO, develops an Individual Partnership Program, outlining the areas of cooperation in which it is interested, and the annual Partnership Work Program lists specific activities to be undertaken.

When NATO created the PFP, it sought to increase contact and cooperation with the newly free states of Central and Eastern Europe, and to strengthen their sense of security. The contacts and programs developed under PFP helped further the political, economic and military reform programs of these states. At the same time, at least for some NATO states,

PFP also served to deflect, at least for the short term, the question of NATO membership for CEE states.⁶ As the debate progressed, however, and NATO enlargement became more of a likelihood, PFP developed accordingly. While PFP membership was by no means a guarantee of eventual NATO membership, in practical terms, serious participation in PFP served as a necessary step in the process. CEE states successfully used the possibilities offered under PFP to aid their efforts to meet NATO membership standards and to improve their ability and readiness to integrate with NATO.

In the mid-1990s, while NATO moved closer towards readiness to accept new members, it continued to avoid setting specific criteria for membership, beyond broad guidelines. The rationale was to avoid a situation where any particular country could expect an invitation to join based solely on “checking the right boxes.” CEE states were sometimes frustrated by vague answers about what specific steps they needed to take to improve their candidacies.⁷ After the first round of post-Cold War NATO enlargement (from the 1997 invitation to the 1999 admittance), however, the Alliance decided at its 1999 Summit that a more robust program was needed specifically for preparing potential NATO candidates. In response, NATO created the Membership Action Plan (MAP) program. This program, through which NATO and individual candidate countries establish clear goals for that country’s reform, and which gives NATO a direct way to influence such reforms, is addressed in greater detail below.

THE ENLARGEMENT DEBATE

Cooperation between NATO and the states of Central and Eastern Europe fostered increased security, and promoted political, military, economic and even social reform in the region. The ultimate goal for many CEE states, however, remained actual membership in the Alliance. Initially reluctant, by the mid-1990s officials at NATO and in its member capitals were seriously considering the possibility. In 1995, NATO itself conducted a study on possible enlargement. The study concluded that “enlargement would contribute to enhanced stability and security for all,” and would strengthen and broaden the transatlantic partnership. It declared that enlargement would enhance stability and security “by encouraging and supporting democratic reforms,... fostering patterns and habits of cooperation, consultation and consensus-building, ... and promoting good-neighborly relations.”⁸ In the study, NATO outlined the broad requirements that candidates would have to meet to qualify for membership. Requirements included a democratic political system, a demonstrated commitment to democratic control of the military, a market economy, respect for human rights,

including minority rights, no border disputes with neighbors, the willingness to integrate with other members' forces, and the willingness and ability to contribute to the Alliance. The realistic possibility of NATO membership in turn spurred CEE states to increase their reform efforts, in an attempt to meet membership standards.

As NATO moved closer towards the decision to enlarge, there certainly was no consensus on the issue. During the mid and late 1990s, there was significant debate among politicians, policy makers, think tanks, academia, the media and the public over whether NATO should enlarge and, if so, which countries should be invited. At one extreme, some have even argued that, with the end of the Cold War, NATO has outlived its usefulness and should be disbanded.⁹ At the other extreme were those who said the West needed to take advantage of Russia's momentary weakness by expanding swiftly into the former Soviet sphere of control, before the eventual resurgence of an aggressive Russia.¹⁰ Between these two extremes were a range of arguments both for and against enlargement. Those in favor included a strengthened alliance, with increased military capabilities, new geostrategic territories, securing democratic gains in Central and Eastern Europe, expanding the zone of stability in Europe, and erasing the Cold War's dividing lines.¹¹ Opponents pointed to the lack of an external threat (and hence rationale for enlargement), the potential for diminished effectiveness (particularly in decision-making) and credibility, a perceived inability to defend new members and the financial cost. Of particular concern was the position of Russia, and the possibility that NATO enlargement could provoke a strong negative reaction from Moscow, perhaps even leading to a resurgence of the Cold War.¹²

At its 1997 summit, NATO extended membership invitations to three states – the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland. The invitation was as much, if not more, a political decision as a security question – the three states were judged to have made the most progress in political, economic and social reform, and thus to have demonstrated adequate commitment to the values of the Western alliance. At the time of invitation, however, no date was set for actual admittance – this would depend upon further reforms, as well as the requirement for many military adjustments necessary to achieve the minimum level of interoperability with NATO. Rather than resting on their laurels of reform successes to date, these states were prodded to redouble their efforts.

The near-unanimous interest of Central and Eastern European states in joining NATO has provided a critical impetus for these countries to undertake the many political, economic, military and social reforms necessary to qualify for membership. They recognize that these reforms are in their own interest, regardless of NATO membership, but potential membership

has provided an additional incentive.¹³ Simeon Saxe-Coburg, the Prime Minister of Bulgaria, a country admitted into NATO in 2004, stated that “bringing Bulgaria into NATO is the best way to make Bulgarians see the value of the necessary and sometimes painful reforms our country has been making.”¹⁴

Likewise, interest in qualifying for NATO membership was an additional impetus for Hungary to conclude treaties on friendship and cooperation with Slovakia in March 1995¹⁵ and Romania in September 1996.¹⁶ Among other issues, each treaty confirmed that the two respective states, in each case long-time rivals with a history of ethnic tensions, had no territorial claims on the other, and addressed the issue of mutual respect for and protection of minority rights. In each case, it was in Hungary’s national interest to conclude these treaties, but NATO’s requirement that potential members have no border disputes, and interest in NATO membership, encouraged a prompt conclusion of these and other similar treaties between states in the region.¹⁷

THE MEMBERSHIP ACTION PLAN

While the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland successfully implemented reforms to meet NATO membership criteria, and achieved the minimum standards for interoperability for formal admittance, there was a sense within NATO following the first round of enlargement that the Alliance could and should provide more guidance to prospective new members. Therefore, as noted above, the Alliance decided at its 1999 Summit to establish a program more robust than PFP, specifically for preparing potential NATO candidates. NATO created the Membership Action Plan (MAP) program, which is offered to countries which have formally declared their interest in joining NATO and which NATO believes have reached the point for consideration. Each year, under the MAP, candidate countries set goals for reform in five key areas: political and economic development, defense and military issues, budgets, information security and legal reform. Political and economic reform encompasses a broad range, including democratic institutions and processes, corruption, human rights, media freedom, arms sales and a host of other topics.¹⁸ Through the MAP, the U.S. and other NATO members work closely with each MAP country to assist it in meeting its goals, and the MAP enables NATO countries to evaluate comprehensively and intrusively each candidate’s progress.

The MAP was used extensively in helping guide the reform efforts of candidate countries in their efforts to qualify for NATO membership, and continues to be used today. At its November 2002 summit in Prague, the Alliance decided that seven candidate countries

had reached the point at which an invitation could be extended. After further efforts to ready themselves for membership, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Bulgaria and Romania formally joined the Alliance in March 2004.

THE EURO-ATLANTIC PARTNERSHIP COUNCIL

While NATO was establishing the MAP to address the need for a more robust PFP program, it also in 1997 established the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council (EAPC) as a more robust successor to the NACC. This political body, which meets monthly at the level of ambassadors, annually at the ministerial level, and at the heads of state level during NATO summits, includes representatives from all NATO and PFP countries. The EAPC provides non-NATO members the opportunity to consult with NATO on a broad range of security-related issues.¹⁹ It enables non-members to have greater influence on NATO engagement with partners, such as planning and approving PFP activities, through EAPC Action Plans. The EAPC has also proven to be a useful forum for addressing specific issues of concern. In 1998, for instance, the EAPC established a Euro-Atlantic Disaster Response Coordination Center, to coordinate responses to natural and technological disasters. At the Prague Summit in 2002, the EAPC adopted a Partnership Action Plan on combating terrorism.²⁰

THE SUCCESS OF ENLARGEMENT

While the integration of the seven newest members cannot yet be judged conclusively, results of the 1999 enlargement suggest that the negative consequences foreseen by opponents to enlargement have not come to pass. The new members have shown solid dedication to the values and goals of the Alliance, and the decision-making process does not appear to have been hampered. New members have been contributors to NATO security, not just consumers, and have participated actively in NATO operations, including Kosovo, Afghanistan and the War on Terror. The financial cost to the United States has been relatively minimal.²¹

Perhaps most significantly, NATO enlargement has not provoked a strong reaction from Russia. The Russian government continues to declare its opposition to NATO enlargement, but this opposition has grown muted over the last decade. Several factors may explain this. First, the Russians have shown a degree of pragmatism, perhaps recognizing that, in the face of NATO's determination to enlarge despite Russian opposition, nothing was to be gained by confrontation. Second, Russia may gradually be coming to the realization that NATO, including an enlarged NATO, is not a threat. U.S. policy makers have repeatedly

stressed to the Russians that an enlarged NATO represents an expanded area of stability to Russia's west, and that this is in fact in Russia's interest. Third, cooperation has been promoted through the NATO-Russia Council. Finally, the realities of the post-September 11 world, and the need for all civilized countries to unite to fight the threat represented by radical fundamentalist terrorists, have also muted Russia's opposition to NATO enlargement.²² At any rate, predictions of a hostile Russian reaction to the 1999 enlargement were exaggerated. Afterwards, Russia drew a new line in the sand, declaring that NATO enlargement into former Soviet territory (i.e. the Baltic states) would be unacceptable – but in 2004 this too came to pass, with little more than pro forma complaints from Moscow.²³

At the same time, an enlarged NATO has resulted in an expanded area of stability, which is in the interest of both the Alliance's old and new members. As stated by the U.S. Ambassador to NATO, Nicholas Burns, accession of new members "reaffirms the importance of security as a condition for progress and prosperity."²⁴ Moving from a "gray zone" of stability to a place in the Alliance has enabled the Czech Republic, Poland and Hungary to further accelerate their political and economic transformation.²⁵ The same can be expected for the seven newest members.

THE FUTURE OF ENGAGEMENT

Although the number of CEE states now members of NATO is greater than the number of those that are not, NATO remains actively engaged with the non-member states. For some of these states, NATO membership remains a strategic goal. For others, particularly in the Caucasus and further east in Central Asia, NATO membership most likely is not an issue, but they are members of PFP. Cooperation with these states remains important, and promotion of further democratic and economic reforms continues to have relevance for regional stability and prosperity. Russia remains a special case for NATO. Through PFP, NATO also maintains a security relationship with the neutral states of northern and western Europe – Sweden, Finland, Ireland, Austria and Switzerland. There is occasional discussion of the possibility of some of these states becoming NATO members at some point in the future. However, since NATO is not engaged in promoting reforms in these states, and since their commitment to Alliance values is not in question, they remain outside the scope of this paper.

In June 2004, at its Istanbul Summit, NATO did not extend any new invitations for membership. However, it reaffirmed that "NATO's door remains open to new members" and that "our seven new members will not be the last."²⁶ There are several states that warrant examination as possible future members. First, there is the group represented by Albania,

Croatia and Macedonia. All three states have formally requested NATO membership, and all are members of the NATO Membership Action Plan (MAP). Ukraine has declared NATO membership a strategic goal, but has not yet been accepted into the MAP program. Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Serbia and Montenegro, are further away from potential membership. In fact, because of their troubled recent pasts, neither state is yet a member of the Partnership for Peace program – but both have declared their interest in joining PFP.

THE U.S. INTEREST

A stable, democratic and friendly Europe is a vital U.S. interest. NATO has proven itself a critical organization for protecting this interest. The U.S. National Security Strategy (NSS) declares that NATO has, “since its inception, been the fulcrum of transatlantic and inter-European security.”²⁷ The NSS further states that, both to meet its core mission of collective defense and to carry out new missions in the post-September 11 world, NATO needs to expand its membership “to those democratic nations willing and able to share the burden of defending and advancing our common interests.”

In June 2001 in Warsaw, President Bush declared that NATO membership should be open to all European democracies that could meet the qualifications for membership.²⁸ As discussed above, an enlarged NATO has enhanced American security by helping increase the ranks of stable, democratic, market-oriented states. The attacks of September 11, however, have reinforced the need for a united front and a concerted, joint effort by the U.S. and its allies. “The case for enlargement... is stronger now than before. Enlargement will contribute to the process of integration that has helped stabilize Europe over the past fifty years and promote the development of strong new allies in the war on terrorism.”²⁹

The former U.S. Ambassador to NATO, Robert Hunter, recently stated, “NATO has long been something more than the sum of its parts. Designed in part to transcend old-fashioned, balance-of-power politics within Europe, it has evolved over the years into a deep-rooted institution with a commitment to democratic values and practices... along with [a] unique, integrated military structure.”³⁰ As the fundamental institution for ensuring European and transatlantic security, a continued strong NATO remains in the U.S. interest. Furthermore, the post-Cold War enlargement of NATO has promoted the expansion of security, stability and prosperity in Europe, and is creating a greater alliance for the U.S.-led War on Terror. Therefore, the U.S. should promote further NATO enlargement, and experience has shown that U.S. leadership will be crucial to the process.

A policy commitment to further enlargement does not suggest a rush to implementation, however. To maintain the capability, credibility and cohesion of the Alliance, no country should be invited or admitted to NATO before meeting the standards and criteria for membership. First and foremost, NATO “represents a community of common values and shared commitments to democracy, free markets and the rule of law.”³¹ Particularly given NATO’s principle of consensus decision-making, it is essential that potential candidates show unequivocal commitment to these values before an invitation is extended. In addition, NATO requires that a potential member be able to contribute to the Alliance. New (and some old) members have shown that there are ways to contribute besides bringing large military forces to the table – even political support can at times be a contribution – but the need to contribute remains a requirement.

Finally, NATO and the United States should continue efforts to build closer relationships, through PFP, the EAPC and bilateral programs, with those states with no expectation of NATO membership. Closer relationships, and further political, economic and social reforms in those states, will promote regional stability and prosperity, even if they are not members of the Alliance.

THE PARTNER COUNTRIES

ALBANIA, CROATIA AND MACEDONIA

These three countries have formally declared their interest in NATO membership, and have MAPs in place. While NATO has always stressed that a MAP does not guarantee an invitation to join, it is viewed as a major step in the process. At its 2004 Summit, NATO decided that these countries did not yet meet the criteria for membership. All three need further progress on a host of political, economic and other reforms; Albania in particular still has fragile state institutions, and Macedonia still faces internal ethnic disputes. Nevertheless, all three have made progress in implementing reforms, and NATO’s 2004 Istanbul Summit Communiqué recognized this.³² By noting this progress in the same paragraph as the declaration that NATO will accept further new members, and stating that NATO will continue to assist the three states in their reform efforts, the Alliance in effect declared that Albania, Croatia and Macedonia will receive invitations when they are ready.

NATO and the U.S. can and should continue to assist this process. As the leading force within NATO, the U.S. has a special role, and can support the effort both within NATO frameworks and bilaterally. Through each country’s MAP program, NATO and the U.S. can

identify and target specific areas for reform. There are numerous ways and means for providing such assistance – such as political and diplomatic advice, expert assistance through such agencies as the Departments of the Treasury, Justice and Commerce (for efforts such as new legislation required for economic, financial and legal reforms), developmental assistance through the U.S. Agency for International Development (for such programs as strengthening civil society), and public affairs programs through the Department of State and Radio Liberty (for such programs as educational exchanges for host-country elites and promotion of free and independent media). U.S. military forces should also play a vital role in preparing these countries for eventual NATO membership. Close cooperation, including joint exercises under PFP, contributes significantly to both the military and defense reform efforts in each country, and furthers the integration of their militaries into the Alliance structure. The U.S. should also increase our education efforts, under the International Military Education and Training Program, for officers from these countries. U.S. training and education will best prepare these officers for leadership roles as their militaries continue the often difficult transition to a modern, western military. Funding programs, such as the joint State-DoD Warsaw Initiative, should gradually reallocate funds from new NATO members, as they reduce their need for such funds, to the remaining potential members.

BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA/SERBIA AND MONTENEGRO

NATO membership for these two states remains a more distant prospect, as both states continue to suffer from a host of problems. That does not mean, however, that eventual NATO membership should not be an objective. Should these states ultimately reach the standards for NATO membership, it would make no sense to leave a NATO non-membership hole in the Balkans. The goal, therefore, should be to continue the process of moving these states towards the point where they will be qualified. The available ways and means are essentially the same as those for the other Balkan candidates – although they will of course be smaller in scope and scale, given the lack of a MAP. As a first step, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia and Montenegro should be assisted in their efforts to qualify for PFP. At the Istanbul Summit, NATO stated that it is ready to admit both states into PFP, once they meet the conditions, and expressed readiness to assist.³³ Even if NATO membership remains a mid- to long-term prospect, assisting reform in these states, and integrating them into PFP, will promote regional stability and prosperity.

UKRAINE

Among the possible candidates for NATO membership, Ukraine is in many ways key, and Ukrainian membership should be a medium-term goal for both Ukraine and NATO. NATO formally recognized the particular significance of Ukraine in 1997, when it established the NATO-Ukraine Commission. The Commission is essentially a special, bilateral sort of EAPC; among Partnership countries only Russia has a similar relationship with NATO. On October 5, 2004, Deputy Secretary of Defense Wolfowitz declared in Warsaw that “our objective of a Europe whole and free will not be complete until Ukraine is a full-fledged member of Europe.”³⁴ As a member, Ukraine would bring far more to the Alliance militarily, economically and geostrategically than the other candidates. It would also be the most problematical in some ways, particularly in its relationship to Russia. While fears over Russia’s potential reaction to NATO enlargement to date have been exaggerated, Ukrainian membership in NATO would be by far the hardest for Moscow to accept. Russia’s ties to Ukraine – including emotional and psychological – run very deep, and many in Russia have yet to come to grips with an independent Ukraine. More than any other state in the region, Ukraine sits in the unenviable position between Russia and the rest of Europe. The U.S. and NATO will need to undertake a strong diplomatic/informational campaign with Russia to lessen Russian opposition to eventual Ukrainian membership.

An equally great challenge concerns Ukraine’s own readiness for possible membership. In 2002, Ukraine declared that NATO membership was its ultimate objective – but stopped short of formally requesting admittance. The rationale for stopping short, many assume, was a fear of being rebuffed.³⁵ Ukraine continues to suffer from shortcomings in its professed political and economic reform goals, shortcomings that have repeatedly drawn comments and criticism from the U.S. and other NATO allies.³⁶ Because of this, NATO decided at its 2002 Summit that Ukraine was not yet ready for a MAP. As noted, a MAP does not guarantee an eventual invitation, but it does create a certain expectation. Instead, NATO established with Ukraine an Action Plan (AP) – very similar to a MAP, but less comprehensive and less intrusive. Ukraine’s implementation of the AP has been mixed – it has made considerable progress in military and economic reform, but less in political reform. Ukraine advocated advancing to a MAP at the 2004 Istanbul Summit, but NATO decided to remain with the AP. In its Summit Communiqué, NATO welcomed Ukraine’s intent to join, but stressed the need for Ukraine to achieve “consistent and measurable progress in democratic reform.” It encouraged Ukraine to accelerate the implementation of its AP goals. Noting the

importance of pending 2004 Ukrainian presidential elections for Ukraine's democratic development, NATO stated it would reassess NATO-Ukraine relations after the elections.³⁷

Ukrainian officials have often expressed frustration at NATO's unwillingness to offer a MAP.³⁸ They have argued, much like the Prime Minister of Bulgaria as noted above, that the prospect of NATO membership would provide additional impetus and leverage to achieve the needed reforms; U.S. and NATO officials have countered that a commitment to the values should come first. The January 2005 change of government in Ukraine – when Viktor Yushchenko became president in a new election after the fatally flawed initial election was overturned by the Ukrainian supreme court, offers the potential for a dramatic change in course. Yushchenko is known as a pro-Western reformer (his candidacy allegedly was strongly opposed behind the scenes by Russia), who in some of his first statements as president declared that Western integration would be the primary Ukrainian foreign policy direction.

The initial reaction from NATO and its member states to Yushchenko's victory has been positive. NATO Secretary General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer stressed, in his January 20 congratulations to Yushchenko, that NATO is ready to support Ukraine's efforts "to implement the ambitious common goals and principles that underpin our deepening relationship,"³⁹ and de Hoop Scheffer represented NATO at Yushchenko's January 23 inauguration. NATO then announced that it would hold a heads-of-state level NATO-Ukraine Commission (NUC) meeting on February 22, and invited Yushchenko to attend.⁴⁰ This was in marked contrast to Yushchenko's predecessor, Leonid Kuchma, who was kept at arm's length by NATO during the final years of his presidency. U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell has also stressed that the U.S. is ready to assist the new Ukrainian government in its reform efforts.⁴¹

This first NATO-Ukraine Commission meeting with President Yushchenko went very well, by public accounts. NATO leaders had almost universal praise for Yushchenko and the victory for democracy that his election represented. Yushchenko stressed that Euro-Atlantic integration is Ukraine's goal, and that Ukraine will take concrete steps to reach this goal. "The most important task for the new government of Ukraine will be to bring the political, social, economic and defense systems of the state in full compliance with the Euro-Atlantic standards."⁴² Yushchenko reiterated that Ukraine is interested in a Membership Action Plan, while noting that Ukraine would make full use of the tools currently available such as the Action Plan.⁴³ Secretary General de Hoop Scheffer emphasized NATO's desire to help Ukraine meet its goals, and stated that the Alliance would sharpen and refocus its ongoing cooperation with Ukraine in line with Yushchenko's priorities.⁴⁴

Ukraine of course has far to go to reach the point where it could qualify for NATO membership, but the new leadership should be encouraged in their efforts to pursue this path. NATO should be thinking now about offering Ukraine a Membership Action Plan. A bold move would have been to offer the MAP at the February NATO-Ukraine Commission (NUC) summit, but this was apparently faster than NATO is prepared to move. At the least, however, the U.S. and NATO should declare in the near future that they will offer Ukraine a MAP in the short term (such as at the next ministerial-level session of the NUC, provided that democratic reforms continue in the meantime. A MAP will not constitute a commitment to Ukraine, but will signal an increased willingness to consider eventual Ukrainian membership. Whether or not a MAP is offered, however, we should continue, and indeed intensify, efforts, such as those outlined above for the other candidate countries, to help Ukraine move closer towards meeting standards for NATO membership. In and of itself, such progress promotes stability in the region.

THE CAUCASUS, MOLDOVA AND THE CENTRAL ASIAN STATES

These former republics of the Soviet Union – Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Moldova, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan – are all members of the Partnership for Peace program. None of these states have expressed formal interest in joining the Alliance, and none has been seriously considered for membership. Several, such as Moldova, Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia suffer from “frozen conflicts,” and all are burdened by the need for significant political, economic and socio-political reform. Nevertheless, it remains important for NATO to continue a program of active engagement with these states. Just as with the Balkan states, it is in the U.S. and NATO’s interest to work with these countries to promote reform and enhance stability by increasing cooperation and integrating them further into Alliance activities. Recognizing the strategic importance of the Caucasus and Central Asian regions, NATO at the 2004 Istanbul Summit noted that it will put special focus on engagement with these states.⁴⁵ At the same time, Azerbaijan, Georgia and Uzbekistan announced that they will develop Individual Partnership Action Plans with NATO, marking an effort to increase and deepen their PFP relationship with NATO. NATO welcomed this step, and should work to ensure that there are concrete results.

RUSSIA

Russia’s relationship with NATO is unique among the states of Central and Eastern Europe. As the primary successor state to the Soviet Union, Russia has a tradition of rivalry

with the Alliance and its members. In addition, Russia has a tradition of seeing itself as a great power, with direct national interests encompassing not only its own vast territory but its neighbors in particular as well. The end of the Cold War marked a significant change in Russia's relationship with NATO and the United States, and the last decade has seen a significant increase in the level and breadth of cooperation between Russia and the West. However, NATO's interests and those of Russia will likely never completely coincide.⁴⁶ At the same time, particularly in the wake of September 11, there are various issues on which NATO and Russia share interests, such as combating terrorism.

Recognizing that European (and by extension American) security ultimately is largely dependent upon maintaining at least non-confrontational relations with Russia, NATO has since the end of the Cold War sought to increase cooperation with its former adversary. Russian objections to NATO enlargement in particular required an intensive dialogue to reduce tensions, and led in part to the conclusion in 1997 of the Founding Act on Mutual Relations, Cooperation and Security between NATO and Russia. The Founding Act established the Permanent Joint Council, a body for consultations and coordination between NATO and Russia on a variety of issues of mutual interest.⁴⁷ At the time, this special relationship was unique between NATO and a Partner country, and reflected Russia's special importance.

As the relationship progressed, particularly after the 2001 terrorist attacks in the U.S., the Permanent Joint Council was succeeded in 2002 by the NATO-Russia Council (NRC). The NRC strengthened the level of cooperation, and gave Russia a voice equal to individual NATO members in discussing and deciding on a wide range of issues (NATO of course reserves for itself alone responsibility over NATO core missions, such as defense of NATO territory, and decisions on NATO membership). Nicholas Burns, the U.S. Ambassador to NATO, and Alexander Vershbow, the U.S. Ambassador to Russia, have stated that the NRC has transformed the relationship between NATO and Russia.⁴⁸ Through the NRC, NATO and Russia are working together on counter-terrorism, counter-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and theater missile defense, as well as traditional PFP activities such as joint military-to-military activities, civil emergency planning and preparations for joint peacekeeping operations. At its 2004 Summit, NATO assessed positively the success of the NRC to date, and reaffirmed its interest in making further progress in its cooperation with Russia.⁴⁹

CONCLUSION

NATO and the United States have played an important role in the post-Cold War transformation of Central and Eastern Europe. While much remains to be done to complete the transformation, in some states more than others, the role has been largely successful to date. Through the promotion of political, economic, military and social reforms, NATO and the U.S. have helped to strengthen democracy, civil society and human rights in the region, while assisting in laying the foundation for future economic prosperity. Cooperation with the states of Central and Eastern Europe, including Russia, has strengthened stability throughout the region and thus the world. The ultimate expression of this increased level of stability has been the enlargement of NATO, which has served to cement the progress made by the new members.

A strong NATO is in the U.S. national interest, as is an enlarged NATO. The U.S. should support continued enlargement of NATO, conditioned on new members meeting all criteria for membership. These criteria will ensure NATO's continued capability, credibility and cohesion. Utilizing a full range of political, economic, military and informational resources, the U.S. and NATO should continue to work to assist prospective new members to meet the qualifications for membership. The process itself promotes the political, economic and social development of these countries, regardless of whether these states ultimately join NATO, and contributes to regional stability. Likewise, NATO and the U.S. need to continue the same efforts with those Partner states without the goal of NATO membership, for the same reasons. Finally, NATO and Russia should continue their cooperation developed under the NATO-Russia Council, which in its first two years has already yielded concrete results benefiting the entire region.

Word count = 6987

ENDNOTES

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³Ulrich, 20-21.

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⁶Sorin Lungu, "NATO Cooperation With Former Adversaries: The Historical Record 1990-1997," *American Diplomacy* Vol. IV, No. 2, Spring 1999; available from <http://www.unc.edu/depts/diplomat/AD_Issues/amdipl_12/lungu_coop1.html>; Internet; accessed 28 January 2005.

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²³Agence France Presse, "Russia Defends 'Paranoia' Over NATO Enlargement," 2 April 2004; available from <<http://www.spacewar.com/2004/040402185237/gy0eladg.html>>; Internet; accessed 22 September 2004.

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³¹Grossman.

³²North Atlantic Treaty Organization, *Istanbul Summit Communiqué*, paragraph 25.

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